PROSPECT: OR, VIEW OF THE MORAL WORLD.

SATURDAY, MARCH 9, 1805. [*NO.* 10.

COMMENTS UPON THE SACRED WRITINGS OF THE JEWS AND CHRISTIANS.

BOOK OF NUMBERS.

In the 12th chapter of this book, there is the following remarkable passage: "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth"—verse 3d. This is a very extraordinary declaration for any man to make about himself! When a man begins to trumpet forth his own virtues, he soon becomes suspected of being destitute of all virtue; he stands justly exposed to the charge of pride and hypocrisy, and his word goes for nothing. The Christian world believes that the five first books in the Bible were written by Moses, and of course that meek and murdering Moses, was the author of the passage just now quoted; Paine, however, in his Age of Reason, has demonstrated that these books were not and could not have been written by Moses, nor till several hundred years after the time of Moses, and of course this author has placed the advocates for revelation in a dilemma, either concerning authorship or credibility. The Age of Reason is not at this moment at command, or we should make some extracts from it upon this subject. One pointed remark, however, in the Age of Reason, is recollected. Speaking of the passage which we have quoted above, it is observed, that if Moses said this of himself, instead of being the meekest man, he was the most vain and arrogant of coxcombs. It is wonderful to observe that those who pretend to associate with celestial powers, and receive instruction from God, are commonly destitute of both meekness and modesty, and very often of civility and customary politeness. They imagine that having talked with Jehovah, and Jehovah with them, they possess the right of abusing the small folks of this world, and of sending them to hell hereafter. In the 13th chapter of this book we have some more specimens of Jewish plotting and contriving for the commission of murder, and for setting on foot a plan to dispossess an inoffensive people of the rights and property to which they were justly entitled. The meek, but blood-thirsty Moses sends off a number of spies to the land of Canaan, to ascertain the number of its inhabitants, quality of soil, &c. The following verses will show the temperament of this man of God. "And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said unto them, Get you up this way southward, and go up into the mountain. And see the land what it is; and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many; And what the land is, whether it be fat or lean, whether there be wood therein or not."—verse 17. This temporizing proposition of Moses, for which, however, he was not remarkable, was opposed by one Caleb, whose blood at that moment had become more heated than his coadjutors in villany. He speaks peremptorily in the 30th verse—"And

Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it." Here is the true spirit of conquest; neither Moses nor Caleb cared a single farthing whether the cause was just or unjust, whether it was right or wrong; the land they were determined to have, and in order to accomplish their object, they must murder men, women and children, and trample down all the exalted principles which ought to adorn the character of man. Great God! are these savage and brutal conquests the consequences of thy divine and immortal mandates?——Ye pious believers in revelation, whose moral sensibility has been blunted by the cruel spirit of fanaticism, will ye never learn to divest your God of savage ferocity? Will you never ascribe to the divinity whom you adore, the high characteristic features without which even man himself would be a wretch and a scoundrel? In short, will you never perceive that wisdom and virtue are essential ingredients in a good character, whether that character be human or divine?

APHORISMS.

Virtue is the art of happiness; not of individual or insulated happiness, but of the happiness of the whole sensitive and intelligent world.

Nature consists of millions of component parts; Philosophy demands of Superstition an answer to this question—are not all these parts co-equal, co-essential, and co-interested in their existence, in time and eternity?

All nature is subject to change; death is not annihilation, but only a change in the form of existence; whatever does exist must continue to exist forever.

Philosophy is the love of wisdom. Why then do fanaticks speak against philosophy? The conclusion is clear; they do not like wisdom.

Is there any universal cure for human misery? Yes; Science and Virtue universally propagated, and universally practised, would render the world completely happy.

Who is the greatest fool on earth? Answer—he who destroys his own happiness and that of his fellow-creatures. Who is the greatest villain? The answer is the same.

Hypocrisy always looks foolish when it gets in company with candour and integrity.

The man who submits to the influence of wealth, will sometimes, in spite of himself be compelled to bow to the shrine of virtue; he will sometimes revere a Socrates, and despise a Creosus.

Superstition is the tyrant of the mind; the energy of thought is the only competent antagonist of this tyrant.

Interest, imbecility, and prejudice, say, that the world will never be better off than at present. Ignorant and malignant advocates of this opinion, you are referred to the history of the twelfth century, in Europe, and to the operations of the human mind, since the discovery of the art of printing, and the fair presumption is, that you may be restored to a state of intellectual sanity.

Physical courage is nothing more than brutal ferocity; but the man who possesses a firm intellectual nerve, merits the applause of the human species.

What is truth? It is nothing more than "*the most just and general relation of things.*" The moral and physical world ought therefore to be contemplated as the source of truth, and the great fountain of human happiness.

THE following petition for repealing the law against Blasphemy has been signed by a great number of respectable citizens in Philadelphia, and presented to the Legislature of Pennsylvania for their consideration. We sincerely wish that it might meet with the success which the nature of the case so forcibly demands. The law against blasphemy, is not only contrary to the constitution of Pennsylvania, but it remains an antiquated fragment of disgrace against the dignified and enlightened character of that commonwealth. Laws of this kind never tend to promote morality; they are only instruments in the hands of malicious men for carrying on cruel and vexatious prosecutions against honest men, without producing any thing substantially good, either to the public or to individuals. It is high time to wipe away the stain of such odious laws from the American character.

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

The petition of the undersigned citizens of the city and county of Philadelphia, respectfully sheweth—That,

Whereas in the year one thousand seven hundred, a law was passed by the Legislature of the then colony of Pennsylvania, in the following words, to wit:

"*Be it enacted*, That whosoever shall wilfully, premeditatedly, and despitefully blaspheme, or speak loosely and profanely of Almighty God, *Christ Jesus, the Holy Spirit, or the Scriptures of Truth*, and is legally convicted thereof, shall forfeit and pay the sum of ten pounds for the use of the poor of the county where such offence shall be committed, or suffer three months imprisonment at hard labour, for the use of the said poor."

Which law, in the opinion of your petitioners, is virtually repealed by the third section of the ninth article of the constitution of this commonwealth, by which it is declared, that "no human authority can in any case whatever controul or interfere with the rights of conscience, and no preference shall ever be given by law, to any religious establishments, or modes of worship." Yet notwithstanding this very excel-

lent provision of the constitution, your petitioners are informed that the courts have since sustained prosecutions under the law aforesaid, and peaceable and orderly citizens have been indicted, convicted, and punished, agreeably to the said law, for avowing sentiments which were the pure dictates of their conscience, reason, and judgment. So that the said law has been and again may be made an instrument in the hands of malicious and evil disposed persons to revenge themselves upon their inoffensive neighbours. Your petitioners are therefore of opinion that the above law is a direct violation of the natural rights of mankind, and an unjust abridgment of the rights of conscience, secured to them by the constitution; and that the second section of the "act for the prevention of vice and immorality," passed in the year 1795, contains a sufficient prohibition of every offence of profane cursing and swearing, which ought to be punished by law, and that the law aforesaid ought to be repealed. Your petitioners, therefore, respectfully pray your honourable body will repeal the said law, in order that it may no longer remain a disgrace to our statute book.

And your petitioners, &c. &c.

Philadelphia, January, 1805.

OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE PERSIANS.

Continued from page 72.

SHARIFTAN, an Arabian writer, gives the following account of the doctrine of Zerdusht, or Zoroaster. "Zerdusht affirmed light and darkness, Yezdan and Ahreman, to be two contrary principles, which were the origin of every thing subsisting in the world; the forms of nature being produced from the combination of these principles: but maintained, that the existence of darkness is not to be referred to the one supreme Deity, who is without companion or equal, but must be considered as the unavoidable consequence of his determination to create the world, in which light can no more subsist without darkness, than a visible body can exist without its shadow." To these accounts we may add that of the Nestorian Bishop, Theodorut Mopsuestenus, who, in his book concerning the Magian religion of the Persians, says, that according to their doctrine, Zarva, or the chief of all the gods, produced Hormisda and Satana.

If these authorities be carefully compared, it will appear probable, that Zoroaster, adopting the principle commonly held by the ancients, that from nothing, nothing can be produced, conceived light, or those spiritual substances which partake of the active nature of fire and darkness, or the impenetrable, opaque, and passive mass of matter, to be emanations from one eternal source; that, to the derived substances he gave the names, already applied by the Magi to the causes of good and evil, Oromasdes and Arimanius; and that the first fountain of being, or the supreme divinity, he called Mithras. These active and passive principles he conceived to be perpetually at variance; the former tending to produce good, the latter evil; but that, through the mediation or intervention of the supreme being, the contest would at last terminate in favour of the good principle. According to Zoroas-

ter, various orders of spiritual beings, gods or dæmons, have proceeded from the deity, which are more or less perfect, as they are at a greater or less distance, in the course of emanation, from the eternal fountain of intelligence; among which, the human soul is a particle of divine light, which will return to its source, and partake of its immortality; and matter is the last and most distant emanation from the first source of being, which on account of its distance from the fountain of light, becomes opaque and inert, and whilst it remains in this state is the cause of evil; but being gradually refined, it will at length return to the fountain whence it flowed. This doctrine of emanation afterwards produced many fanciful opinions in theology.

OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE INDIANS.

From whatever quarter India, the country which, as adjacent to Persia, next comes under our notice, received its wisdom, there can be no doubt that its wise men very early obtained a high degree of reputation. We find that it was visited, for the purpose of acquiring knowledge, by Pythagoras, Anaxarchus, Pyrrho, and others, who afterwards became eminent philosophers in Greece.

It is not, however, easy to collect satisfactory information concerning the ancient philosophical history of these remote countries. Modern travellers, either from the want of an accurate acquaintance with the language of the country, and a ready access to the interior regions, or from the changes which have happened in the tenets and customs of these nations since they have been under the dominion of the Moguls, or on account of the poetical and allegorical dress in which the history of India is clothed, or lastly, through the suspicion of fraud which hangs upon their sacred books, have been able to furnish little assistance to those who are desirous of searching into the antiquities of India. Our chief reliance, in this part of our work, must be upon the ancients, and particularly those who wrote after the time when Alexander extended his conquests into this country. At that time much information was gained concerning the religion, the tenets, and the manners of the Indians, which was afterwards committed to writing, and is preserved in the geography of the accurate Strabo, in the works of Plutarch and Arrian, and afterwards in those of Porphyry, Philostratus, and others. But even these writers must be read, upon this subject, with some degree of distrust; for their accounts are given wholly upon the reports of unknown persons, who themselves visited only the interior parts of the country; and they are written under the strong bias of a disposition to judge of the Oriental philosophy by comparing it with the Grecian.

In the most ancient times, we find among the Indians a race of wise men, who are sometimes called Gymnosophists, from their custom of appearing with the greater part of the body naked, and sometimes Brachmans: but this latter is properly the name of only one class of these philosophers, who were divided into several sects.

The Brachmans were all of one tribe. From the time of their birth they were put under guardians, and, as they grew up, had a succession of instructors. They were in a state of pupilage till thirty-six years of age; after which they were allowed to live more at large, to wear fine

linen and gold rings, to live upon the flesh of animals not employed in labour, and to marry as many wives as they pleased. Others submitted, through their whole lives, to a stricter discipline, and passed their days upon the banks of the Ganges, with no other food than fruits, herbs, and milk. The Samanæans were a society, formed of those who voluntarily devoted themselves to the study of divine wisdom. They gave up all private property, and committed their children to the care of the state, and their wives to the protection of their relations. They were supported at the public expense, and spent their time in contemplation, in conversation on divine subjects, or in acts of religion. A wonderful circumstance is related concerning these philosophers; that frequently, without any apparent reason from ill-health or misfortunes, they formed a resolution to quit the world, and, when they had communicated their intention to their friends, immediately, without any expressions of regret on the one side, or of apprehension on the other, threw themselves into a fire which they had themselves prepared for the occasion. There was another sect, called the Hylobeans, who lived entirely in forests, upon leaves and wild fruits, wore no other clothing than the bark of trees, and practised the severest abstinence of every kind.

From this account of the Indian Gymnosophists, it is easy to perceive, that they were more distinguished by severity of manners than by the cultivation of science, and that they more resembled modern monks than ancient philosophers. Some of them, indeed, allowed themselves a greater latitude of manners than others; but their general characters were, rigid abstinence, indolence, and the pride of independence. Of their high spirit Strabo relates the following example. When Onescritus was commissioned by Alexander to invite a body of these philosophers to visit him, they refused to go, saying, that if Alexander had any business with the Brachmans, he might come to them.

The rigours which have been, and are to this day, practised among the Indians, are such as could not be credited but upon the best authority. Pliny relates, that some have stood with their eyes stedfastly fixed upon the sun from morning to night; and that others have remained, in one painful posture, upon the burning sands, for whole days: stories which are confirmed by the reports of modern travellers concerning the voluntary severities, and even tortures, which are commonly practised upon themselves by the Indian Bramins.

Such examples of abstinence and hardy endurance could not fail to make a strong impression upon the minds of the multitude, and to Gymnosophists great influence, in an age of ignorance and superstition. In order to preserve and increase their power, they made use of two expedients. The first was, the keeping among themselves the whole business of foretelling future events. "The wise men alone," says Arrian, "were skilled in the arts of divination, or permitted to practise them. They only predicted the changes of the seasons or public calamities, thinking it a degradation of themselves, or their art, to employ it upon trifling occasions." They, doubtless, made use of this precaution, in order to render themselves the more necessary to the ruling powers, who would easily perceive the value of such an instrument of superstition. The other expedient, by means of which they maintained their authority, was the appropriating to themselves

the regulation of religious concerns. To establish their reputation for sanctity, they spent the greater part both of the day and the night, in performing acts of worship, which were chiefly addressed to the sun. By these means, they made themselves of consequence to the ruling powers, and became objects of veneration to the people; so that they could easily gain access wherever they pleased, and obtain whatever they wished. Many tales are related concerning these Gymnosophists, which are too strongly marked with the characters of fiction to merit a place in the history of philosophy.

Among the few Italian philosophers, whose names have been preserved to the present times, the most celebrated is Buddas. Little is known concerning him, more than that he was a religious impostor, who, by pretending to a divine original and miraculous birth, obtained credit and authority while he lived, and after his death was honoured with divine worship. St. Jerom relates, that he boasted of having been brought forth from the side of a virgin. This impostor is probably the same who is at present honoured in Siam, China, and Japan, under the names of Somonacodom, Xeko, and Fohi.

Among those Brachmans, who are mentioned with respect by the Greek writers who treat of the time when Alexander visited India, are Dandamis and Calanus. Dandamis is celebrated for the boldness with which he censured the intemperance and licentiousness of Alexander and his army, in a conference which he held with Onesicritus. Calanus, when he saw Alexander's messengers clothed with fine linen garments, and elegantly adorned, laughed at their effeminacy, and requested them, if they wished to hold any conference with the Brachmans, to lay aside their ornaments, and, like them, recline naked upon the rocks. It is also related, that when he found the infirmities of age coming upon him, he devoted himself to voluntary death, and ascending the funeral pile, said, "Happy hour of departure from life, in which, as it happened to Hercules, after the mortal body is burned, the soul shall go forth into light!" The doctrines of the ancient Indians, as far as they are at present known, may be arranged under three classes, Divine, Natural, and Moral.

The sum of their doctrine concerning Divine Subjects, is as follows:

God is light, not such as is seen, like the sun on fire, but intelligence and reason; that principle, through whose agency the mysteries of knowledge are understood by the wise. He never produced evil, but light, and life, and souls, of which he is the sole Lord. The former and governor of the universe pervades it, and is invested with it, as with a garment: he is immortal, and sees all things; the stars, the moon, and the sun, are his eyes. He is beneficent, and preserves, directs, and provides for all. The human mind is of celestial origin, and has a near relation to God. When it departs from the body, it returns to its parent, who expects to receive back the souls which he has sent forth. Besides the supreme divinity, inferior deities, proceeding from him, are to be worshipped, but not with the sacrifice of harmless animals, nor in temples, and upon altars adorned with gold and gems, but with eyes lifted up towards heaven, and with minds free from criminal passions.

The notions, which the ancient Indians seem to have had of God, approach so near to the tenets of the Persian Zoroaster on this subject,

that it is very probable, that his doctrine passed over to India, and was, in part at least, received among them. In speaking of the universe as the garment of God, their idea seems to have been, that the intellectual principle, which animates all things, is contained within the sphere of the universe. They conceived God to be the soul of the world, a rational and intellectual light, whence all good is produced, and the chief seat of whose divinity is the sun. Their notion of divine providence, deduced from that of the soul of the world, probably extended no farther, than that this principle is necessarily the first spring of all motion, life, and enjoyment. The human soul they represented as of divine original, because, with all the other Eastern nations, they conceived it to be a particle, or an emanation, of that intellectual fire, by which they believed the universe to be animated. Their doctrine of the return of the soul to God, which some have confounded with the Christian doctrine of the resurrection, seems to have meant nothing more, than that the soul, after being disengaged from the grosser material body, would be re-united to the fountain of all being, the soul of the world. It is an opinion still found among the Indians, and probably of very ancient date, that there is in nature a periodical restitution of all things; when, after the return of all derived beings to their source, they are again sent forth, and the whole course of things is renewed. Inferior divinities were, doubtless, worshipped among them as emanations from the first spring of life.

Some of the doctrines of the Greeks concerning Nature, are said to have been derived from the Indians; but there is little reason to doubt, that these accounts are the mere fictions of Grecian ingenuity and vanity. Natural science was probably no farther advanced among them, than merely to furnish them with instruments of imposture, in the arts of astrology and divination.

Many extravagant assertions have been advanced concerning their moral system. It has been said, that the fables of Pilpay, which have been translated from the Indian tongue into the Persian, and have passed from these into European languages, were written by an antient Indian philosopher, 2000 years before Christ. But the work contains many internal proofs, that it was written at a much later period: probably it was the production of some ingenious Persian, who, to give it the greater credit, passed it upon the world as a relic of the antient Indian philosophy. All that can be certainly known concerning the morality of the Indians, must be inferred from the manners of the Brachmans; whence we may conclude, that it chiefly consisted in voluntary acts of abstinence and mortification, and in a contempt of death.

To be continued.

DISCOURSES upon Moral and Philosophical subjects, will be delivered by the Editor, every Sunday evening, in Mustan's Long Room, No. 11, George-Street, at half past six o'clock.

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